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The Border Turn in Literary Studies: Border Poetics and Figurations of Border Crossings

1. Introduction: Borders and Aesthetic Practices

In today's world, movement and migration have become key factors, with a war over contested borders raging in Ukraine, the European Union struggling with issues of migration, Great Britain facing renewed challenges with border crossings, and the entire world facing a major health crisis that knows no borders.¹ Globally speaking, violence at borders and border traumas connected with the crossings of borders have increased in recent times. Especially in times of a post-Brexit Britain we have witnessed a renewed focus on re-bordering, and territorial boundaries have become more relevant than ever in political action and in people's everyday lives in Great Britain. As a result, the border has increasingly found its way into literary representations, and it has become the subject of various cultural and artistic productions which deal with border experiences, border crossings, and aesthetic border negotiations.

In a post-Brexit Europe, in times of the politicization of migration, border securitization, and the politics of deterrence, borders have not only become important for refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants who have crossed borders on their migratory routes but also for the inhabitants of border regions, whose cross-border life worlds were suddenly irritated by closed borders and police controls. During the past twenty years, the field of Border Studies has grappled with these societal challenges, evolving into a multidisciplinary endeavour that examines the multiplicity, complexity, and multi-scalarity of the border that goes against the dominant hegemonic, common-sense understanding of the binary logic of the border (Laine 2016; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012). In the social sciences, the "mobilities turn" (Adey et al. 2013; Sheller and Urry 2006) has indicated new research agendas for considering the movements of people, objects, capital, and information. In the humanities, questions of mobility and borders have received renewed attention, and the "border turn" in Literary and Cultural Studies (Schimanski 2017) has drawn attention to the study of border cultures in various borderlands.

This special issue shows that descriptions of border crossings and border tropes have proliferated in British literature not only but especially since the Brexit referendum. As it turns out, border figurations have generally become important in fiction and in autobiographical narratives about mobility and cultural crossings and have come to play a key role in the understanding of how different conceptions of the border enter into exchange across various discourses. This article will focus on the important function of borders in cultural productions, and it aims at staking out the role that

1 This article is based on a previous overview of the connections between borders and aesthetics, which was published in German in the handbook *Grenzforschung* (Fellner 2021). Thanks to Laurie Ross for translating parts of this text.

borders have played in Literary Studies. Showing how borders and aesthetic practices are interrelated, I will argue that the border has become an important paradigm in literary analysis, which provides a useful way of conceptualizing the increasingly difficult realities of transnational experiences in global times. Border figurations have become important especially in narratives of (im)migration, diaspora, and flight. They have played an important role in postcolonial literatures or New Literatures in English. Conspicuously, with their focus on hybridity, interculturality and border crossings, narratives that employ border tropes question the reliance of literary analysis upon frames which are dictated by the paradigm of the national. As a result, border narratives have become especially important in transnational literatures. Contributing to a re-mapping of the national boundaries of literatures, border narratives focus on intertwined geographies and cross-filiation among cultures. They challenge the hegemonic force of the national, foregrounding what Arjun Appadurai has termed a "postnational imaginary," which "proves capable of capturing these complex nonterritorial postnational forms of allegiance" (1998, 166).

The border turn in literary studies has encompassed a shift "from centre to periphery, from text to margin" (Schimanski 2017, 63). As Schimanski explains:

Where we before – and I am generalizing here – focused on parts and wholes, characters and motifs, themes and meanings, works and texts, authors and national literatures, we have for quite some time now been concentrating increasingly on border phenomena: divides and fragments, margins and supplements, paratexts and protocols, dialogicities and receptions, minorities and contact zones, the in-betweens and third spaces of deterritorialized, transnational and postcolonial worlds. (63)

Borders, border figurations, and imagining borders in an aesthetic sense have assumed a central role in the literary imagination. My overview of the extent to which borders have come to matter in Literary Studies must be prefaced by a brief discussion of the interconnectedness of borders and aesthetics in general. That the border has been able to play such a significant role in literary texts has to do with its intimate connection to the field of aesthetics. While topographical borders have moved to the centre of aesthetic representations, they do not only do so on the level of plot as a literary topic. Often, the concept of the border figures on a symbolic level, referring to borders between cultures, racial/ethnic groups, genders, or social classes. Importantly, borders are necessary perceptual categories without which we cannot make sense of the world (cf. Wokart 1995, 289). Any form of identity formation hinges upon the act of bordering; borders have constitutive functions as they divide and connect, operating as crucial relational and linking elements. Conspicuously then, because it also works as a perceptual category, the semantic range allows borders to draw closer to aesthetics. As Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe have suggested, "[a] border that is not sensed by someone or something is not a border" (2013, 242). We have to perceive and recognize the border as such in order to consider it as a border. Consequently, one can say that borders can actually be seen as inherently aesthetic (cf. Larsen 2007, 97).

Just as the border has an innate aesthetic dimension, our understanding of the concept of aesthetics is also contingent upon bordering practices. If one understands aesthetics as something that evokes sensory impressions – etymologically, aesthetics is

derived from the Greek word *aisthēsis*, which means sensation or perception (Peres 2011, 379) – then one can say that aesthetics is unimaginable without the concept of border. Aesthetics develops its meaning through the ordering and dividing demarcation force generated by the concept of border. Svend Erik Larsen explains the connection between borders and aesthetics as follows:

From this perspective aesthetics may be characterized as the study of the capacity of human beings to themselves produce material boundaries in various media – linguistic, non-linguistic and combinations thereof. Such boundaries create meaning that may transform already existing boundaries otherwise created. Furthermore, aesthetics will also be the study of the changeable conditions of this production and the changes brought about by humans themselves. Thus, looked upon in a boundary perspective, *aesthetics is the study of human interaction with already existing boundaries with the possibility of changing them.* (2007, 100; original emphasis)

Borders can therefore be seen as constitutive of aesthetics, which develops as a dimension of the experience of borders. It is this meaning of border as a tool of categorization that Jacques Rancière draws on in his definition of aesthetics as the "distribution of the sensual" (2013, 7). For Rancière, aesthetics is "neither art theory in general nor a theory that would consign art to its effect on sensibility. Aesthetics refers to a specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts" (39-40).

After having established the interwovenness between borders and aesthetics, I will now proceed to show in which ways Literary Border Studies can gain from new theories and methods of Cultural Border Studies. As I want to suggest, we can identify three dimensions of how the border has come to figure in Literary Border Studies (cf. Fellner 2021a, 438). In a first step, I will show in which ways the border itself can be seen as a site of development of aesthetic phenomena. Next, the tradition of aesthetic representations and figurations of borders and narratives of border crossings will be discussed. Finally, some conceptualizations of border aesthetics as an approach of Cultural Border Studies are to be highlighted, which illuminate the "politics/aesthetics nexus" (Brambilla 2016, n.p.).

2. The Border as a Place of Innovative Cultural Production and Development of Aesthetic Phenomena

Since the spatial turn, questions about cultural and historical constructions and the semantization of spaces and their borders have become incredibly important (cf. Döring and Thielmann 2008). Territorial borderings are seen as part of the construction principles and governance formation of nations, the effects of which can be felt and which produce disputes and border conflicts. As a topographical phenomenon but also as a metaphor, borders refer not only to demarcation lines per se, but also to border regions, border areas and so-called borderlands, whereby the border here becomes an "unmarked area in between" (Bühler 2012, 34; my translation). According to Marc Boeckler, borderlands represent special border areas: They are "materializations of limited debordering and dedifferentiating differentiation" (2012, 44; my translation). Borderlands are "stubborn, contradicting and unnatural" places, indefinable spaces that

defy "unambiguous attributions" and take pleasure in "the moment of irritation" (49; my translation).

The term "borderlands" can be traced back to the Chicana author, theorist and activist Gloria Anzaldúa, who gave the impetus to the new research direction of Border Studies in the USA in the late 1980s.² For Anzaldúa, borderlands are a space for interaction and a contact zone, in which there is a striking power imbalance and where spaces of power become visible in a special way. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987/2012), Anzaldúa describes borderlands as "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (2012, 25). Borderlands, adds Marc Boeckler, are those places "where the multiplied madness of global modernity has recreated a territorial being with anti-essentialist intent" (2012, 49; my translation). As one of "the most powerful discourse formations of modernity" (do Castro Varela 2018, 30; my translation), border thus means "not only that which lies between spaces and territories, but also marks individual spaces" (30; my translation). In this overdetermined place, it is not only two states that border each other: This border forms a transition zone, an open wound, "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture" (Anzaldúa 2012, 25; original emphasis). Thus, a border culture emerges at the border, which is indeed pervaded by asymmetries and violence, but which is also hybrid and can create a place in which meanings are in flux and in which a productive and creative area of tension for cultural debate arises. In the foreword to the first edition, Anzaldúa (2012, 19) describes herself as a "border woman," who grew up under special conditions on the soil of the country that the USA usurped in 1848 after the Mexican-American War under the *Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo*.

Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element. There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind, in being 'worked' on. (19)

As a lesbian woman of colour living on the border, she no longer has a home and thus has to create a new border culture: "[...] I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture – *una cultura mestiza* – with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture" (44; original emphasis). It is this new hybrid border culture described by Anzaldúa that represents the breeding ground for aesthetic representations for Chicana/x writers and artists.³

2 Originally, it was historian Herbert Eugene Bolton (1921), who coined the term 'borderlands' in the 1920s in order to stress the similarities in the histories of various nations in the hemisphere (cf. Sadowski-Smith 2011). While Bolton's concept of borderlands never gained much influence beyond historical scholarship, it was Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) that became the foundational text for Border Studies in the humanities.

3 The 'x' in the term Chicana/x is used as a gender-neutral suffix in order to avoid the gendered ending of Chicano/a. The 'x' also has special significance in Chicana/x literature because it highlights the border-crossing nature of this body of literature (cf. Fellner 2021b, 7).

According to Anzaldúa, the border functions as a space of difference. The "operation of bordering distinguishes two sides" (Hohnsträter 1999, 239; my translation). In this sense, borders, in the humanities and cultural sciences, have "become a universal metaphor for everything that can be dichotomously split up and then interwoven again in the most varied of ways" (Geulen and Kraft 2010, 1; my translation). Postmodern and postcolonial ways of thinking, which place the marginal, the liminal and the transgressive in the foreground of scientific debates, act across borders anyway and resist a strict separation between the identity and non-identity of things, concepts and people, and look for possibilities to transcend binary logic and the defining demarcations that dictate them. Homi K. Bhabha is often referred to in this context, as he speaks of a "third space" that arises when cultures meet and that forms a zone in which "cultural difference" underlines the constant interaction between cultures and their flexible nature (1990, 207-221; 1994, 36-39). From then on, borderlands become the focus of interest because, as was emphasized in the Chicana criticism in the early 1990s, they can represent places of "politically exciting hybridity, intellectual creativity, and moral possibility" (Johnson and Michaelsen 1997, 3).

In his book *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* the Chicano cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo analyzes the borderlands of the U.S.-Mexican border, which he saw as an alternative concept to the then prevailing static concept of culture and the classical understanding of unique cultural patterns. "By defining culture as a set of shared meanings," he wrote, "classic norms of analysis make it difficult to study zones of difference within and between cultures. From the classic perspective, cultural borderlands appear to be annoying exceptions rather than central areas of inquiry" (Rosaldo 1993, 28). These borderlands, he then adds, "should not be regarded as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative production that require investigation" (208). Referring to Anzaldúa, he presents the hybrid culture of the Chicana as an exemplary border culture. Anzaldúa, he says, "argues that because Chicanos have so long practiced the art of cultural blending, 'we' now stand in a position to become leaders in developing new forms of polyglot cultural creativity. In her view, the rear guard will become the vanguard" (216).

The fact that borders and border areas are now seen as avant-garde aesthetic spaces and can increasingly slip into the pioneering role in literary innovation also has to do with the theories of various thinkers of postmodernism and postcolonialism: e.g., Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Néstor García Canclini and Walter D Mignolo. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha stated with recourse to Martin Heidegger: "[T]he boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing*" (1994, 5; original emphasis). The border can therefore be seen as a privileged place of representation in which something new arises through the meeting of multiple cultures and through the act of cultural translation. The cultural work of border areas thus lies in the fact that they produce hybridity, which, in turn, as Edward Said called them, can produce "hybrid counter-energies" (1993, 335), i.e., resistive energies and creative forces that have the potential to interrupt, denaturalize and dismantle hegemonic formations. In the 1970s, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari wrote about precisely this revolutionary potential for cultural production in border areas (e.g., Deleuze and Guattari 1975). As Werner Wintersteiner explains, their concept of minor

literature (*littérature mineure*) is based on the idea of interlinking politics and aesthetics and says that the power of cultural renewal emanates from the margins and the position of the marginalized and deterritorialized (2006, 156). In the 1980s and 1990s, (post-) structuralists like the semiotician and literary critic Yuri Lotman had thought of boundaries as necessary dividing lines of the cultural field. His concept of the semiosphere, even though it puts the focus on bounded semiotic space outside of which the production of meaning is not possible, views the border as the periphery of any given semiotic space, which is full of cultural dynamics, exchange, and productivity of cultural semiosis (Lotman 1990).

The idea that borders and boundaries can be understood as places of productive cultural production has also been well developed in Latin American research. Similar to Bhabha's concept of hybridity, Néstor García Canclini's idea of cultural hybridity encompasses an understanding of hybridization as "*socio-cultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects, and practices*" (1995, xxv; original emphasis). His understanding of cultural hybridization points to the specific constitution of the borderlands in the Americas, establishing the relation between culture and globalization, especially with regard to the question of U.S. dominance in culture and science and the interaction of indigenous and external factors in Latin-American reality (cf. Schirilla 2001, 37-38). The concept of hybridity has become important in the context of Mexican-American borderlands, especially in connection with the concept of *mestizaje*.⁴ With her call for a new *mestiza* consciousness in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa shaped an identity rhetoric that saw the design of a third element in borderlands as a positive evaluation of the diversity and the acceptance and tolerance of contradictions and ambiguities. For Anzaldúa, *mestizaje* signals a special awareness of borderlands, which allows heterogeneity and difference to persist and has learned to endure the state of the transitory. It refers not so much to the common intersection of two cultures, but to the development of a separate system of meaning that is now coming to the fore in the discussion: "a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness – a *mestiza* consciousness" (Anzaldúa 2012, 101-102; original emphasis). For the residents of the borderlands, this new awareness of borders represents a juggling act with different lines of tradition and, in the sense of an oppositional tactic, functions as a counter-term to U.S. hegemony.

Based on Anzaldúa's concept, Walter Mignolo and the representatives of the *Grupo Modernidad/Colonialidad* elaborated their conceptualizations of border living and border thinking. Border areas, as Mignolo sees them, open up a way of thinking across borders and a space for hidden knowledge that is resistant to Western hegemonic knowledge production and can also correct it (cf. do Castro Varela 2018, 29). Mignolo's concept of "border thinking" (2000, 49) "pensamiento fronterizo" (2003, 19) stimulates

4 Even though the concept of *mestizaje* is rooted in a specific Mexican context and is strongly connected to the theories of José Vasconcelos, it also refers to the fusion of African, Indigenous, and European characteristics, which account for the "race dynamics throughout the Americas as a whole" (Bost 2005, 8).

a kind of thinking that not only takes place *across* the border, i.e., sees the border as an object, but also thinks *through* and *from* the border (cf. Fellner and Kanesu 2023). Conspicuously, border thinking can make forgotten knowledge visible again with the help of aesthetic means and can thus have a decolonizing effect. The attempt at this type of decolonization is undertaken, for example, in the art project Decolonial Aesthetics, a thought and action project that combines decolonial discussions with artistic and aesthetic debates and practices.⁵ Acts of making hidden border knowledge visible in the form of decolonial aesthetic are also the basis of a number of literary texts by indigenous writers and artists (cf. Fellner 2016), which do not actually operate directly from territorial borderlands, but do approach the imagery of the border and border thinking in an aesthetic way. The antiAtlas of borders project should also be mentioned here, which is a group of academics and artists who attempt to articulate the aesthetics of the border on their website and in their antiAtlas journal.⁶ As becomes clear, border areas and borderlands are meaningful spaces which become effective as places of aesthetic representation.

3. Aesthetic Representations of Borders and Narratives of Border Crossings

While, on the one hand, borders display their sensual components and can be perceived through them and, on the other hand, border spaces, in their function as contact zones, become avant-garde places of aesthetic representation, borders have also been moving into the focus of aesthetic representations in recent years. In Anglophone literature in particular, borders are playing an increasingly important role as evinced by the many novels, short stories, poems and plays in Anglophone literatures about borders and several edited collections on Anglophone border crossing narratives (cf. Ross 2020; Fellner 2021b). The emerging field of Cultural Border Studies has become prominent in recent years and offers extensive theorizations of the border and provides attempts to define the border as an aesthetic object (cf. Schimanski and Wolfe 2007a; Holm et al. 2012; Viljoen 2013; Schimanski and Wolfe 2017; Wille et al. forthcoming). Frequently, the literature of the border and the spaces in between is associated with the literature of minorities, the (de-)colonized or migrants.

In the Anglophone context, the terms "border literature" or "border writing" are often used to refer to those writings which deal with borders. Emily D. Hicks' *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text* (1991) was an early attempt to see border writing as a genre in world literature that sees the concept of the border as a privileged metaphor for a reality of displacements and cross-border cultural contact. Based on Deleuze and Guattari's definition of minor literature, Hicks' book defines border writing as follows:

What makes border writing a world literature with a 'universal' appeal is its emphasis upon the multiplicity of languages within any single language; by choosing a strategy of

5 See <www.transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/decolonial-aesthetics/> or the section "Decolonial AestheSis" on the website *Social Text Online*: <https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_topic/decolonial_aesthesis/> [accessed 20 April 2020].

6 See <<https://www.antiatlas.net/antiatlas-of-borders/>> [accessed 20 April 2020].

translation rather than representation, border writers ultimately undermine the distinction between original and alien culture. (1991, xxiii)

The poetics of border literature that Hicks creates uses holography as a metaphor for the multi-layered nature of border writing and encompasses a large part of Latin-American literature (e.g., the works of Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar and Luisa Valenzuela). In their conception of border aesthetics, the concept of the border gains importance primarily in its metaphorical use. In contrast, Chicana literature sees itself as decidedly border literature, which in many respects was also decisive for the increased interest in the border as an aesthetic topos in literary texts.

Revealing a cross-cultural and a trans-national perspective, writings by Chicana authors are marked by a border consciousness which exhibits the multiplicities of languages, cultures, and perspectives. Migration and the crossing of borders have always been appropriate metaphors for Chicana novels. As a geopolitical as well as a cultural area the border has become a metaphor for the marginal role of Mexicans in American society on the one hand, and the blending of two cultures, on the other. Chicana literature has contributed to the fact that within American literature the paradigm of the borderlands has to a large extent replaced the older paradigm of the 'frontier.' It has also contributed to the changing of the canon of American literature. As José David Saldívar has argued, "the invocation of the U.S.-Mexico border as a paradigm of crossing, resistance, and circulation in Chicano/a studies has contributed to the 'worlding' of American studies and further helped to instill a new transnational literary in the U.S. academy" (1997, xiii). Chicana literature views itself as an aesthetic product of the border, as a body of literature which makes the border sensible and palpable. Its texts discursively produce the border, performatively constituting border subjects. Alfred Arteaga has explained, "[t]he border is, after all, the line of national differentiation that gives birth to Chicanos, not just for having crossed it or having been crossed by it, but for living in the border zone between nations that the line engenders" (1997, 9). As a result, most Chicana works are marked by a special form of border aesthetics, which is characterized by bilingualism or a multilingual poetics (Arteaga 1994; 1997), genre hybridity and a borderlands-consciousness, as described by Gloria Anzaldúa. Border literature also often relies on the techniques of Magical Realism and employs the figure of the trickster (Sadowski-Smith 2008, 9).⁷ As a transgressive discourse, border literature is clearly situated at the crossroads of different cultures.

Interestingly enough, in literary texts, figurations of border crossings refer not only to literal acts of the crossing of territorial borders triggered by the movement of people or the experiences of migration and displacement, but they also refer to the many meeting points and the multiple crossings that symbolic or conceptual borders constitute. It is these crossings of boundaries or binary oppositions which create conflicts in a border narrative and get the story going in any medialized cultural production of border crossings (Fellner 2021b, 12). Border crossings, therefore can be described as the site of the X, the crossing, which calls forth "an occasion for story or narration"

7 The trickster is a character who appears frequently in Indigenous stories. Disrupting conventions and transgressing norms, the trickster is a boundary-crossing and often shift-shaping figure which has been used as a literary device in mediating cultural difference.

(Schimanski and Wolfe 2007b, 10) In his poem "X antecanto: the xicano sign" (1991), Alfred Arteaga has written about the X as sign for border crossings: The X stands for 'ch' in "xicano verse, verse marked with the cross, the border cross [...]" which for Chicana is "our mark, our cross, our X, our sign of never ceasing being born at the point of two arrows colliding, X, and the gently laying of one line over another line, X" (2020, 3). Taking their cue from this poem, Ana Manzanás and Jesús Benito have defined border writing as literature which is situated at "the X, the broad area of the borderlands, the ground which allows space for *mestizaje* and hybridity" (Benito and Manzanás 2002, 14). Consequently, any form of border mediation can be said to be situated on the "X." Representations of border crossings not only hinge on this X, but flesh out this in-between space, the site of various crossings of territorial, generic, symbolic, temporal or epistemological borders (cf. Fellner 2021b, 13). It will be interesting to see how border discourses and border aesthetics will leave their mark over the next years.

4. Conceptualizations of Border Aesthetics: Border Poetics and Bordertextures

While borders are increasingly moving into the centre of literary representations, there are also more conceptual attempts to theorize the interweaving of the concept of the 'border' with the aesthetic field. In order to be able to grasp the complexity of the concept of the 'border' in the various border discourses and their entanglement with aesthetics, an interdisciplinary approach from literary, cultural, social and political studies is necessary. In the course of turning away from the analytical view of the border as an ontological object towards its constitutive discourses and practices, a number of concepts have gained importance in Cultural Border Studies (such as bordering, border regime, borderscapes) that attempt to conceptually define borders and processes of demarcation as broadly as possible. These are not only increasingly gaining acceptance in those disciplines that deal with aesthetic forms, objects, practices and dimensions, but are also constantly being further developed and refined with regard to their applicability. From a literary perspective, questions about the process of border demarcation and the discussion of different concepts of border crossings have taken on a central role (cf. Schimanski and Wolfe 2007b, 9), which brings up the question of the poetic and poetological potential of the border. In its manifestations and effects, the border in literature not only finds its way into the text thematically, but also determines it aesthetically in form and constitution, from its narrative form to the genre tradition. Johanna M. Gelberg describes this possibility of designing the border to "'participate' in literature" as the "poetics of the border" (2018, 21; my translation). As she explains:

It turns out that the border is not just a historical fact, but that it is becoming a literary giant that participates in shaping the story of two states. Thanks to the border, new literary possibilities are revealed: narrative conventions are further developed and narrative traditions are updated. This formative potential of the border substantiates the thesis of a poetics of border. The existence of the border leads straight to a literary examination of it that goes beyond a mere description. The border proves its poetic potential. (8; my translation)

The belief that the border plays a part in shaping literature gives the border a poetic power, which, when transferred to other aesthetic forms, can become effective in all

cultural products. This makes the border readable and tangible without necessarily having to be handled as an explicit topic in the text (21). It is this poetological possibility of shaping the border that was theorized by the research group Border Poetics/Border Culture, initiated by Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe at UiT The Arctic University of Norway (formerly University of Tromsø).

The border poetics concept developed by this group aims to provide a methodologically-sound basis and terminology for literary studies. As the working group explains on their website:

The *Border Culture/Border Poetics Research Group* sets out to develop theoretical and practical strategies (a 'border poetics') for examining the function of these forms of representation in the intersection between territorial borders and aesthetic works. Analysing primarily border-crossing narratives in cultural expressions, it aims to test three main theses: 1) that narrative and symbolic representation is a central element in border formation and experience; 2) that textual or medial borders within or around aesthetic works are related to the borders represented in these works; 3) that figurations of borders in cultural expressions matter for social, political, and historical processes of bordering.⁸

The two publications *Border Poetics De-Limited* (2007a) and *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections* (2017), both edited by Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe, were pioneering works in the field of border aesthetics and, on the one hand, represented the literary concept of border poetics and, on the other hand, opened up the interdisciplinary field of border aesthetics.⁹

According to Schimanski, border poetics describes a specific type of reading that examines the question of which strategies and narratives are used in a literary text to create and cross different borders such as national, institutional and generic borders. Here, the concept of 'border' is broadly defined: "Border poetics builds on this proliferation of borders, limits, thresholds and boundaries, positing the interplay of topographical, symbolic, temporal, epistemological and medial borders in any narrative of border-crossing" (Schimanski 2019, 2). Border-crossing narratives thus form the core of border poetics (cf. Schimanski 2020, 19), which propagate a type of thinking of the border that takes place from the procedural and embodied perspective of the border-crossing narrative (cf. Schimanski 2006, 41). It is particularly the multi-layered overlays of the various border planes that come to the fore in literary analysis. First of all, a distinction is made between two basic levels of borders, which in the literary text manifest themselves as 'borders represented' and 'bordered representation.' These are each subdivided into five additional border planes: topographical, symbolic, conceptual, temporal and textual borders (Schimanski 2020, 85-100). As Steinger explains:

8 See <www.en.uit.no/forskning/forskningsgrupper/gruppe?p_document_id=344750> [accessed 14 March 2023].

9 According to Schimanski, the term "border aesthetics" goes back to Chicano performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, who used the concept in 1991 in order to refer to the specific aesthetics in the US-Mexican borderlands (2019, n.p.).

Borders can sit simultaneously (without a hierarchy) on these different planes, which is why they are conceptualized as mutual articulations, mappings or projections, whereby these 'overlaps' do not exactly match so that breaks and folds (border zones) arise. (2012, 44; my translation)

As a basis for literary analyses, the concept of border poetics offers a useful terminology, but it leaves open a specific theory of borders, rather promoting a variety of theoretical concepts and approaches (cf. Schimanski and Wolfe 2007b, 11).

The field of border aesthetics is broader in a disciplinary sense and focuses on the general context of the representation of borders in artistic productions and the different perceptual processes that constitute borders. Conceived as a theoretical approach for a border analysis, border aesthetics foreground the interwovenness between borders and aesthetics and focus on frictions and changes that arise when borders and aesthetics collide (cf. Rosello and Wolfe 2017, 6). Here, too, an attempt is made to subdivide, whereby the subdivision in the field of border aesthetics is based on six perspectives: Ecology, Imaginary, In/visibility, Palimpsests, Sovereignty and Waiting, which, seen together, are meant to make theoretically tangible the way territorial and conceptual borders are perceived and the role they play (cf. Schimanski and Wolfe 2017).

The two concepts of border poetics and border aesthetics, which have so far best theorized the connection between border and aesthetics, especially for literary studies, provide an important impetus for the poetic potential of the border by presenting an analytical and conceptual tool that enriches cultural border (space) studies. Recently, additional conceptual projects have been developed that attempt to theorize the concept of border and emphasize the complexity of the concept of border. The concept of borderscapes offers a starting point here, which sees the concept of border in transition from a border line to a border area as a border landscape of multidimensionality (cf. Brambilla 2015). Derived from Arjun Appadurai's concept of 'scapes' (landscapes), which, in times of globalization, formulates the increase in connection and the fluidity of symbolic and material life that connect space and time, the concept of borderscapes emphasizes different forms and interactions of borders as territorial, economic, social, linguistic and cultural borders. This complexity of understanding borders is also addressed by the concept of bordertextures, which, from a cultural studies point of view, sees borders as a structure woven from practices and discourses with different points of reference (cf. Weier et. al. 2018). The term "texture" indicates the materiality of the fabric (of discourses and practices) and its cultural weaving patterns and thus also makes a statement about the nature (of borders and differences) that bring the threads together to form cultural and social reference points.

Concretely, in my understanding of the term, the metaphor of textures in the concept of bordertextures takes its creative force from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* in which Anzaldúa refers to her border writing as a "mosaic" or "weaving pattern" (2012, 88). The metaphor of weaving, I argue, is constitutive to the act of bordertexturing, which can be seen as a performative process of the creation of a thickly amalgamated web of corporeal and other disciplinary discourses which form a dense border texture. The bordertextures approach sees itself both as a potential object of analysis as well as a practice and a textual approach, an interpretative strategy, which allows us to analyze the constitutive interwovenness of borders (cf. Fellner forth-

coming). For literary analysis, bordertextures or rather the strategy of border-texturing can then serve as a tool to work out various interrelationships between aesthetic representations of the border with other discourses and practices. In this act of bordertexturing, the deconstruction of hegemonic structures and (power) relationships is important, whereby alternative stories and forms of knowledges can be uncovered, for example in literary texts by postcolonial writers. In addition, bordertexturing also allows the multiple relationships between border discourses and aesthetic negotiations of the border to be re-established and rewritten. Bordertexturing, as I see it, entails a thinking "*through* or *from* the border, rather than thinking *about* it" (Fellner 2020, 291; original emphasis) which as a form of decolonial practice may both inform a researcher's attitude and positionality as well as the decolonial strategies that specific cultural productions use "in order to lay bare the workings of colonialism and imperialism, which have been instrumental in establishing borders in the first place" (291).

5. Conclusion

As I have tried to show, the border has become an important paradigm in literary studies, and border figurations and imagining borders in an aesthetic sense have assumed a central role in the literary imagination. Not only can borders be seen as places of development of innovative, creative phenomena, but there is also a strong tradition of aesthetic representations and figurations of borders, especially when it comes to the U.S.-Mexican border. In recent years, border narratives have become important in many Anglophone literatures. Border figurations, as I have stressed, have become especially important in global narratives of migration and cultural crossings. Cultural encounters, intercultural meetings, and representations of alterity can be seen as border-crossing movements which structure literary text. Tracing a series of theoretical concerns and concepts which have been used in order to theorize borders from a literary and cultural studies perspective, I have introduced the concept of bordertextures. Bordertextures entail the creativity and the energy that emerges from subaltern subject positions, which has the potential of offering a powerful tool for the analysis of alternative forms of knowledge that often rest hidden in border narratives and that can be carved out through decolonial readings of these texts.

The border, as should have become clear, has great poetological potential. It does not only figure on a thematic level in literature, but also determines a literary text aesthetically from its narrative form to its genre. As a "literary giant," it has the power to shape the text (Gelberg 2018, 21). It is this agency of the border that has garnered interest in Literary Border Studies, triggering a series of conceptualizations of the relation between borders and aesthetics.

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